

**PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT****LANDMARK NAME:** Trone-Howe House**AGENDA ITEM:** A.1**OWNERS:** Dorothy Knox Houghton, Houghton Family Trust**HPO FILE NO.:** 18L166**APPLICANTS:** SAME AS OWNERS**DATE ACCEPTED:** Oct-17-2018**LOCATION:** 4019 Inverness Drive, Houston, Texas, 77019**HAHC HEARING:** Jan-24-2019

**SITE INFORMATION:** Track 10 & 11A, Block 90, Tall Timbers Section of River Oaks, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. The site includes a two-story, 5,900 square foot, single family residence and an attached two-story 1,040 square foot garage and apartment.

**TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED:** Protected Landmark Designation

**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY**

The Trone-Howe House, was designed and built in 1957-59 in the Tall Timbers section of River Oaks. Birdsall P. Briscoe was the architect; Rustay & Martin were associate architects. Marxen & Son was the general contractor. The Trone-Howe House meets three of the eight criteria for listing as a Protected Landmark. It possesses character, interest, and value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural legacy of mid-twentieth-century Houston (1). It is identified with its architect, Birdsall P. Briscoe, who contributed significantly to the cultural development of twentieth-century Houston (3). And it exemplifies the twentieth-century Southern Colonial architectural style and country house building type (4).

The Trone- Howe House at 4019 Inverness Drive, meets Criteria 1, 3, and 4 for Landmark Designation and Criteria 1 for Protected Landmark Designation.

**HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE**

The Trone- House, was designed and built in 1957-59 for Dorothy Virginia Trone Howe (1911-2009), the widow of Knox Briscoe Howe (1903-1951) and, subsequently, the widow of Edmund McAshan Dupree (1892-1969), whom she married in 1961. Mrs. Dupree was the mother of two children, Dorothy Knox Howe and Harris Milton Howe. Dorothy Trone was born in Rosenberg, Texas, the daughter of a Fort Bend County cattle rancher, and grew up in Houston, where she attended public schools. She was a graduate of MacMurrey College for Women in Jacksonville, Illinois, class of 1932. Until her marriage to Knox Howe in 1941, Dorothy Trone was the society columnist for the *Houston Post*. Mrs. Dupree was a horsewoman. Her obituary in the *Houston Chronicle* stated that she was a member of the American Saddlebred Horse Association and that she exhibited her homebred champion horses at Houston's Pink Oak Charity Horse Show, where between 1986 and 1988 she and her saddlebred, Blue Beau Starr, won the Ladies Fine Harness Division championship for three consecutive years. In 1988 she and Blue Beau Starr also won the reserve world's championships in the ladies and amateur fine harness divisions in Louisville, Kentucky. She was actively involved in supporting the Houston Symphony Orchestra, the Pan American Roundtable, the Houston Museum of Natural Science, and the Houston Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. Mrs. Dupree was also a member of the Texas and Southwest Cattle

Raisers Association, the Friends of Mount Vernon, the Fort Bend County Museum, the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, and the Friends of the Houston Public Library. She was a member of the First Presbyterian Church of Houston and is buried in the Howe family plot in Glenwood Cemetery. In 1985, the house was acquired by Mrs. Dupree's daughter and son-in-law, Dorothy Knox Howe and Thomas Woodward Houghton (1943-2002). Mrs. Houghton is the current owner.

The Trone-Howe House qualifies for listing as a Protected Landmark because it possesses character, interest, and value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural legacy of mid-twentieth-century Houston. It was designed and built as a private monument to the distinguished Texan family heritage of Mrs. Dupree's first husband, a great-great-grandson of the man for whom Harris County is named. The house maintains its integrity to an exceptional degree and has never been altered or added onto.

The Trone-Howe House qualifies for listing as a Protected Landmark because it is identified with its architect, Birdsall P. Briscoe, who contributed significantly to the cultural development of twentieth-century Houston. Briscoe (1876-1971) was one of Houston's foremost country house architects from 1912, when he began independent practice, until his retirement in 1962. This was the last house Briscoe designed before his retirement. Birdsall Briscoe was a first cousin of Joseph Milton Howe (1874-1937), the father of Knox Briscoe Howe. Birdsall Briscoe and J. Milton Howe were the grandsons of Mary Jane Harris and Andrew Briscoe. Andrew Briscoe was the first county judge of Harris County, appointed to that position in 1837 by Sam Houston, president of the Republic of Texas. Mrs. Briscoe was the only daughter of John Richardson Harris, who in 1826 established the town of Harrisburg at the confluence of Buffalo and Brays bayous, the first town in what became Harris County, Texas. In 1836, when the congress of the Republic of Texas organized the county, it was named for Harrisburg; in 1839 the congress altered the county's name to honor John R. Harris. Birdsall Briscoe was an architect of exceptional skill and refinement. His houses are concentrated in four elite Houston neighborhoods: Courtlandt Place, Shadyside, Broadacres, and River Oaks. Briscoe designed the first house built in River Oaks, a summer house for the cotton exporter William L. Clayton and his family (1924). He collaborated with the architect John F. Staub on the design of Bayou Bend (1928), the house of Ima, Will, and Mike Hogg, the siblings who developed River Oaks. Of the approximately sixty-three houses Briscoe designed in Houston during his fifty-year career, thirty-three were built in River Oaks, most of these between 1935 and 1942. During the 1930s, Briscoe was South Texas District Officer of the Historic American Buildings Survey, directing the documentation of eighty-two historic sites in fifteen counties in east, southeast, and south-central Texas. He was also one of the thirteen founders of the Harris County Heritage Society in 1954. When Briscoe was elected to Fellowship in the American Institute of Architects in 1949, his fellowship citation extolled the "good taste, elegance, and suitability for locale" of the houses he designed. The Trone-Howe House exemplifies the architectural attributes associated with Briscoe's career as one of Houston's foremost country house architect.

The Trone-Howe House additionally qualifies for listing as a Protected Landmark because it exemplifies the twentieth-century Southern Colonial architectural style and country house building type. Birdsall Briscoe was instrumental in establishing the country house type as the preferred elite house type in Houston in the 1910s. He sustained this identification during the 1920s with the houses he designed in Shadyside, Broadacres, and River Oaks. The country house was a twentieth-century house type, most

often built in the suburban neighborhoods of U.S. cities during the first half of the century rather than on country estates. Like a house built on a country estate though, the country house type was designed to open to its grounds, often through windows or French doors opening from floor-level sills to give access to paved terraces and gardens. In recognition of the Howe-Briscoe-Harris family heritage, Briscoe designed the house in what was often described, beginning in the 1920s, as the Southern Colonial style. This entailed a symmetrically organized, two-story house faced with a two-story high colonnade. The Trone-Howe House is Briscoe's interpretation of this architectural genre. It is a monumentalized version of the house that John R. Harris's widow and her sons built in Harrisburg in 1836 to replace John R. Harris's house, which the army of General Antonio López de Santa Anna burned in April 1836 during the Runaway Scrape. Birdsall Briscoe was born in the Harris House in Harrisburg forty years after its completion. The two-story Harris House was symmetrically organized, with pairs of square-proportioned rooms flanking a central passageway. The hipped-roof Harris House was surrounded on three sides by two-story, shed-roofed galleries. Although images of the Harris House make it look like a Louisiana planter's house, one of the Harris sons, Lewis Birdsall Harris, wrote in his diary that he and his brothers based its design on that of their grandfather's house in Seneca County, New York. Birdsall Briscoe approximated the 18-foot-by-22-foot room dimensions that Lewis Birdsall Harris mentioned, although the central hall of the house is fourteen feet wide, rather than twelve feet, as in Briscoe's great-grandmother's house. Briscoe gave the Trone-Howe House a much grander appearance than the Harris House by surrounding it on three sides with a colossal colonnade of square wooden piers that frame a two-story high portico paved with black slate. Triple-hung windows that open from floor-level sills on both the first and second floors contribute to the perception of grandeur, although the exterior surface of the house is white-painted brick. Briscoe imbued the Clayton Summer House on Inwood Drive with a Southern Colonial identity; its design is clearly modeled on George Washington's house, Mount Vernon. The J. M. Johnson House at 3401 Sleepy Hollow Court (1936, demolished), the J. Curtis McKallip, Jr., House at 3425 Sleepy Hollow Court (1938), the Edmund J. Fountain House at 2308 River Oaks Boulevard (1938), and the Lewis N. White House at 3707 Knollwood Drive (1940) are other interpretations by Briscoe of the Southern Colonial genre in River Oaks. At the time of this application, there are nine Briscoe-designed houses in Houston designated as City of Houston Landmarks or Protected Landmarks.

The Trone-Howe House is significant because it indirectly references, through its architecture, the distinguished family history of its owners. It is significant as the last work of the Houston architect Birdsall Briscoe, built in a Houston residential neighborhood with which his career was especially identified, and is significant because it exemplifies a house type and architectural style that were associated with Briscoe.

The Trone-Howe House was built in Section 1 of Tall Timbers, which the River Oaks Corporation platted in 1939. Tall Timbers was to be the country estate section of River Oaks, with large (in some cases multi-acre) lots available, some with frontage on Buffalo Bayou. River Oaks advertising graphics from the early 1940s depict Tall Timbers as a place where residents could ride horseback for recreation. The subdivision of large lots and the replacement of houses built in the 1940s and '50s with much larger houses during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries have altered the rustic character of Tall Timbers. Although it was not built on an unusually large lot, the house retains a sense of Tall Timbers's

rustic landscape because of the heavy tree and vegetation cover that screens the house and its grounds from surrounding streets and houses.

The Trone-Howe House has repeatedly been open to the public on tours. It was featured by the Rice Design Alliance on a tour of Briscoe's architecture in 1988 and on a tour focusing on the architectural history of River Oaks for the national annual meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians in 1999.

## **ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY**

The Trone-Howe House, occupies Lots 10 and 11A of Block 90 in Section 1 of Tall Timbers, one of the eighteen sections that comprise the Houston residential neighborhood of River Oaks. This flat lot of slightly less than one acre in size is located at the northeast corner of Inverness Drive and Del Monte Drive. The street fronts of the lot are screened by mature shade trees and dense hedges. A driveway paved with exposed aggregate concrete circles in front of the house, which faces west toward Inverness.

The house is shaped in plan like a thick letter T, although there is a one-story rear extension at the southeast corner of the house that is linked to the freestanding, two-story, four-car garage by a roofed, open-air passage. The house is surrounded on its west front and north and south sides by a colonnade of square wood piers that rise the full height of the house to support a broad, flat roofed portico. The portico terrace is eleven-feet, six-inches wide and paved with black slate. The lineup of piers (eight across the front elevation and four on each of the side elevations) gives the house its monumental scale. The west (front) elevation of the house is symmetrically organized. The wide, paneled front door is set into a deep recess approached by a marble-paved platform that ascends two steps above the portico terrace. Spanning the length of the recess is a horizontal overlight above the door with muntins organized in a "wishbone" pattern. A decorative center block is embedded in the raised brick band that frames the entrance recess. Above the entrance are three six-over-six-paned sash windows. Pairs of triple-hung, six-over-six-over-six-paned sash windows on each floor flank the central bay. These are framed by hinged, louvered, wood shutters. The hipped-roofed house is symmetrically flanked by tall brick chimney stacks on each side serving the living room and dining room on the front of the house and the library on the back side of the house. The Trone-Howe House is constructed of hollow tile block and surfaced externally with brick, painted white. Black-painted wrought iron, designed by Briscoe, is used for the guardrail panels on second-floor windows and on a small balcony that projects off the rear, faceted stair bay in front of the second-level stair window. A wrought iron porte-cochère projects off the south side of the house and is accessible from Del Monte Drive.

East of the rear of the house and facing Del Monte Drive is a two-story, four-car garage. Like the house, it is faced with white-painted brick and has a hipped roof. Briscoe ornamented the garage doors with a horizontal running band of raised Greek key ornament.

The contractors who built the house, Paul Hans Marxen (1893-1961) and his son and partner Robert James Marxen (1921-1996), were veteran River Oaks builders, known for the high quality of their residential construction work.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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*The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by the Historic Preservation Office, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.*



**Sec. 33-229. Criteria for protected landmark designation**

<b>S</b>	<b>NA</b>	<b>S - satisfies</b>	<b>D - does not satisfy</b>	<b>NA - not applicable</b>
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**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the Trone-Howe House at 4019 Inverness Dr, Houston, Texas, 77019

**HAHC RECOMMENDATION**

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the Trone-Howe House at 4019 Inverness Dr, Houston, Texas, 77019

**EXHIBIT A**

**PHOTO**

THE TRONE-HOWE HOUSE

4019 INVERNESS DRIVE

Aerial Photo



# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

## THE TRONE-HOWE HOUSE 4019 INVERNESS DRIVE

CURRENT PHOTO – SOUTHWEST ELEVATION



THE TRONE-HOWE HOUSE  
4019 INVERNESS DRIVE

CURRENT PHOTO – NORTHWEST ELEVATION



# CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

## THE TRONE-HOWE HOUSE 4019 INVERNESS DRIVE

CURRENT PHOTO – WEST (FRONT) ELEVATION FACING INVERNESS DRIVE



THE TRONE-HOWE HOUSE

4019 INVERNESS DRIVE

CURRENT PHOTO – REAR (EAST) ELEVATION



THE TRONE-HOWE HOUSE  
4019 INVERNESS DRIVE

CURRENT PHOTO – GARAGE NORTH (REAR) ELEVATION



THE TRONE-HOWE HOUSE  
4019 INVERNESS DRIVE

CURRENT PHOTO – BREEZEWAY



THE TRONE-HOWE HOUSE  
4019 INVERNESS DRIVE

CURRENT PHOTO – GARAGE FACING DEL MONTE DRIVE



# CITY OF HOUSTON

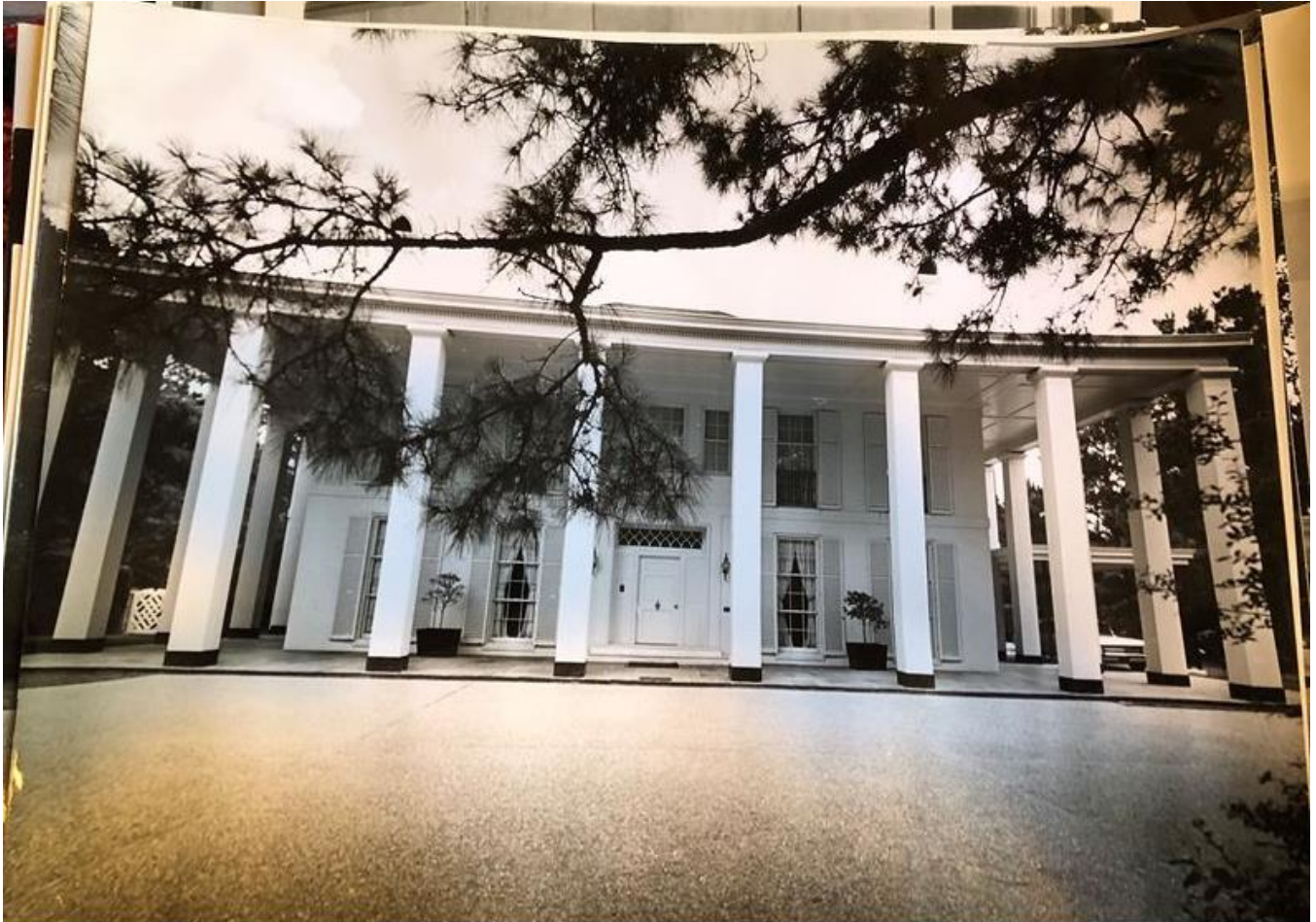
Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

THE TRONE-HOWE HOUSE

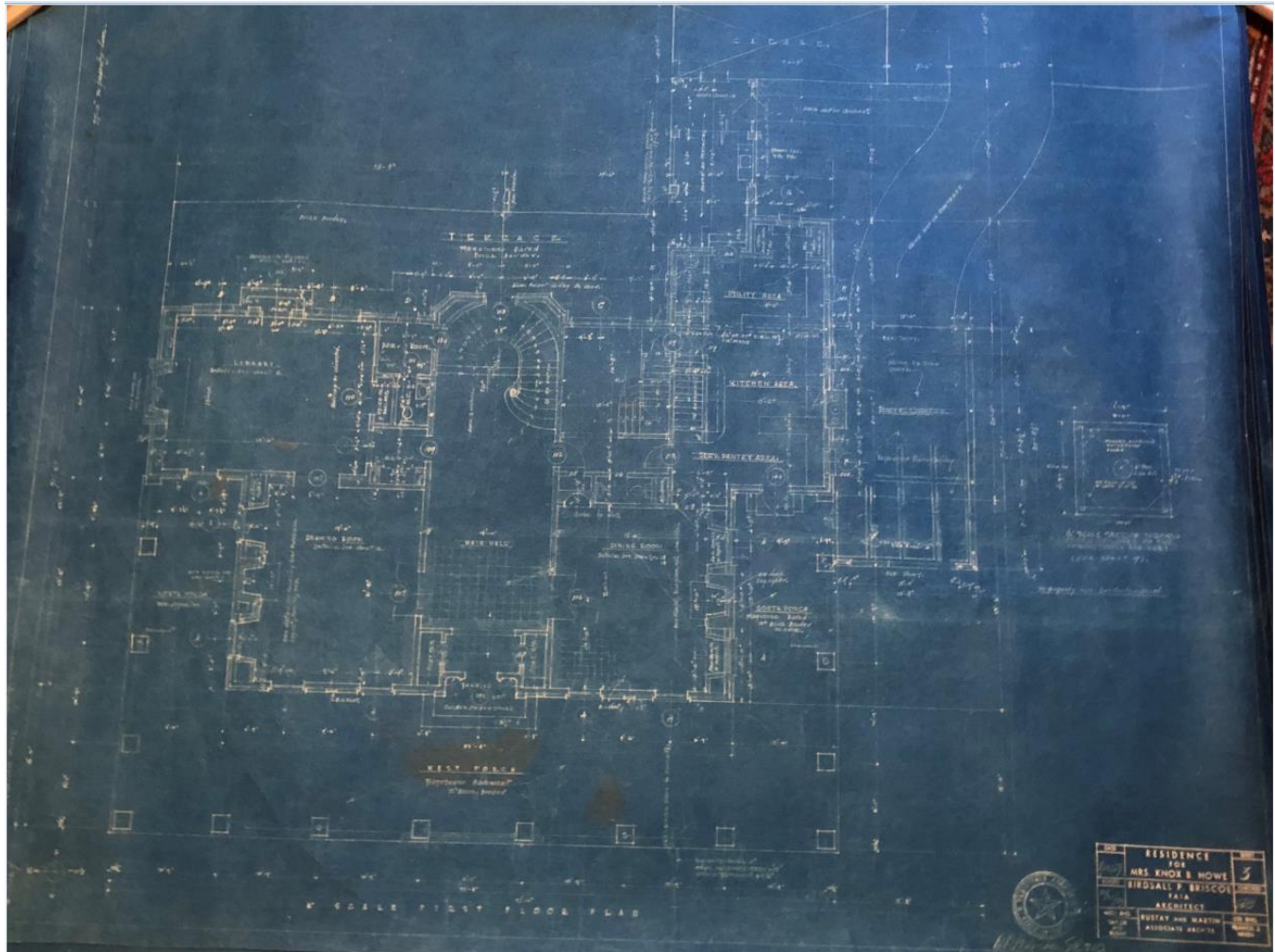
4019 INVERNESS DRIVE

1964 PHOTO

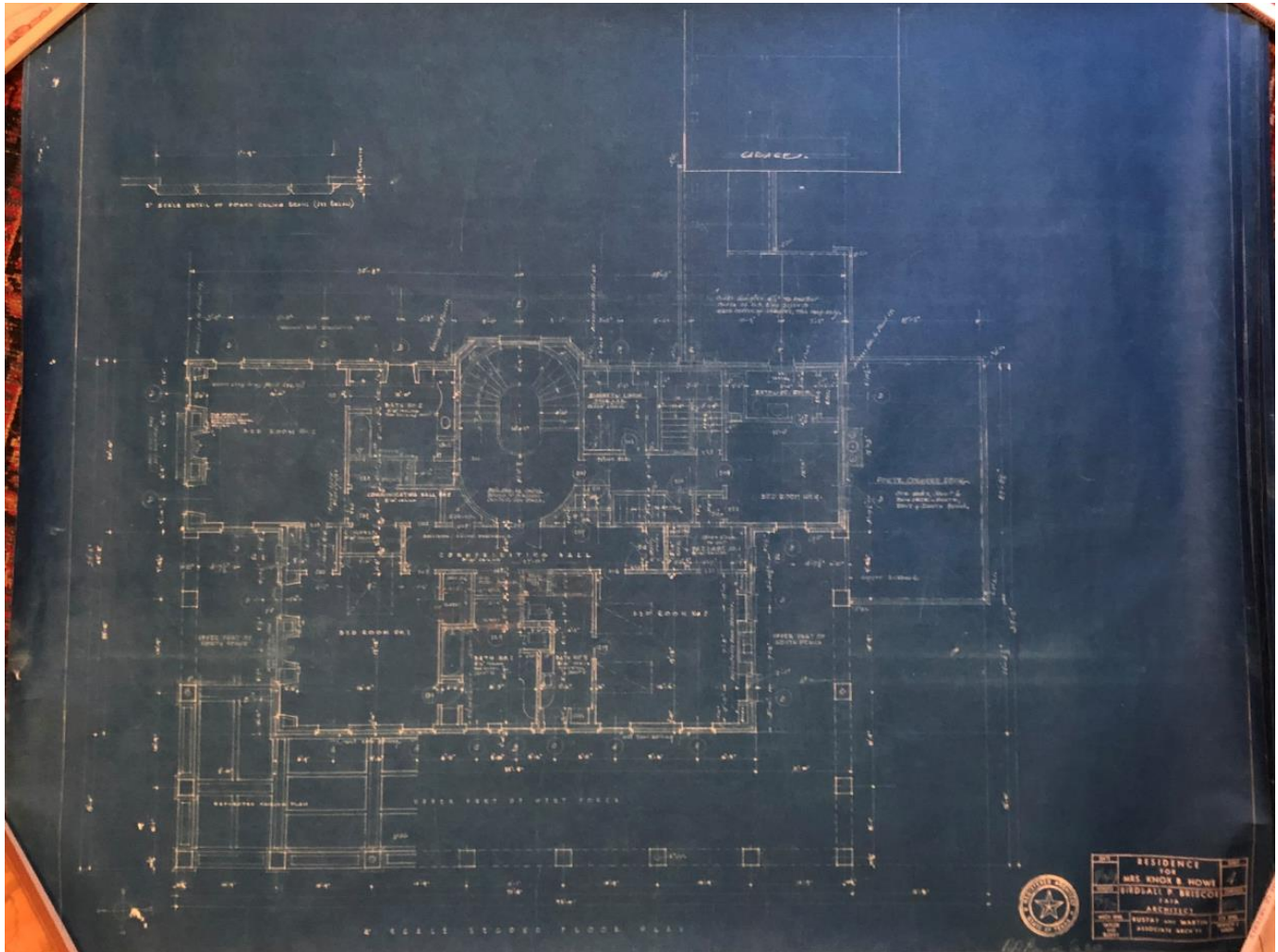




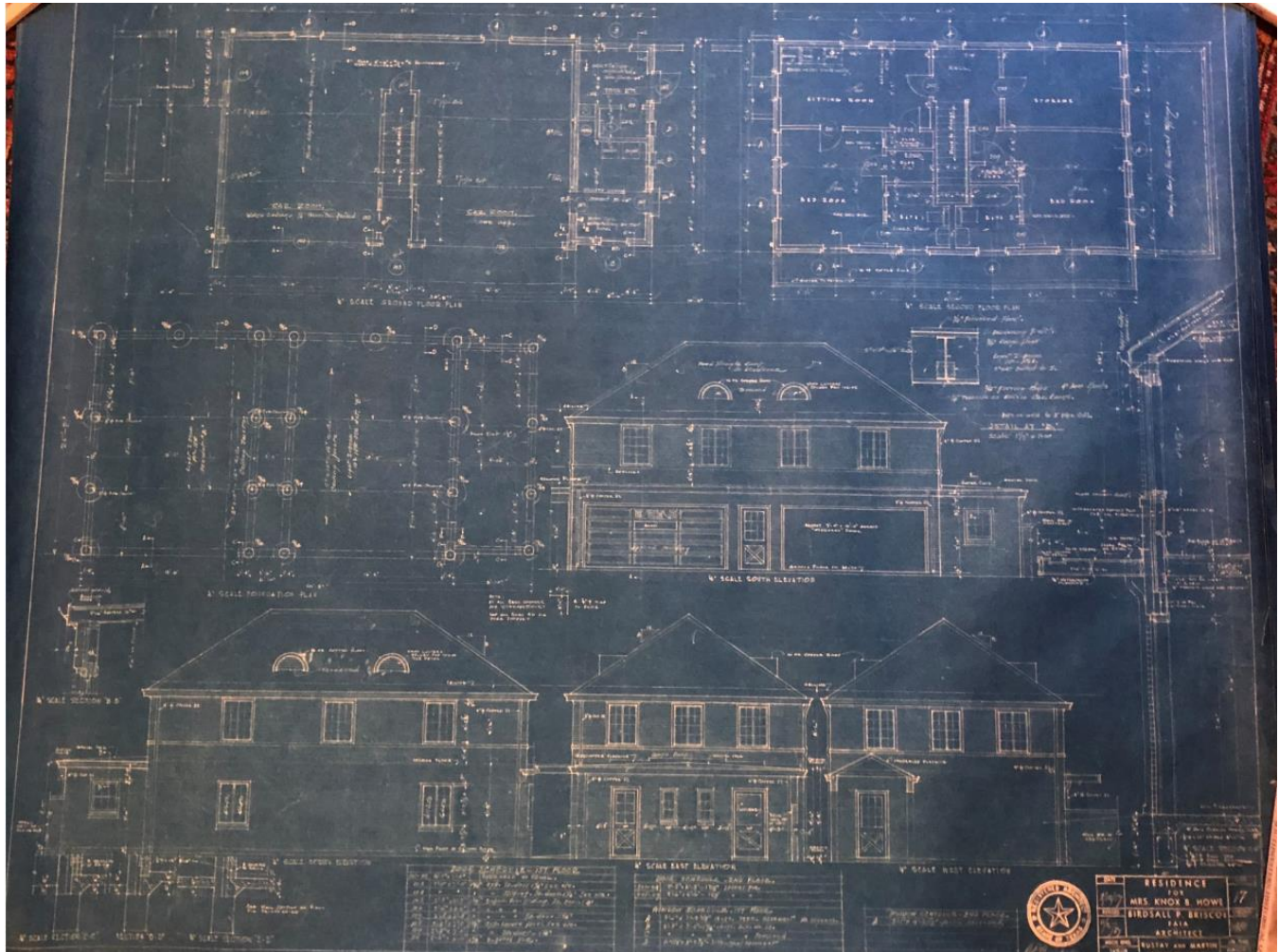
**EXHIBIT C**  
**BLUEPRINTS**  
**THE TRONE-HOWE HOUSE**  
**4019 INVERNESS DRIVE**  
**FIRST FLOOR**



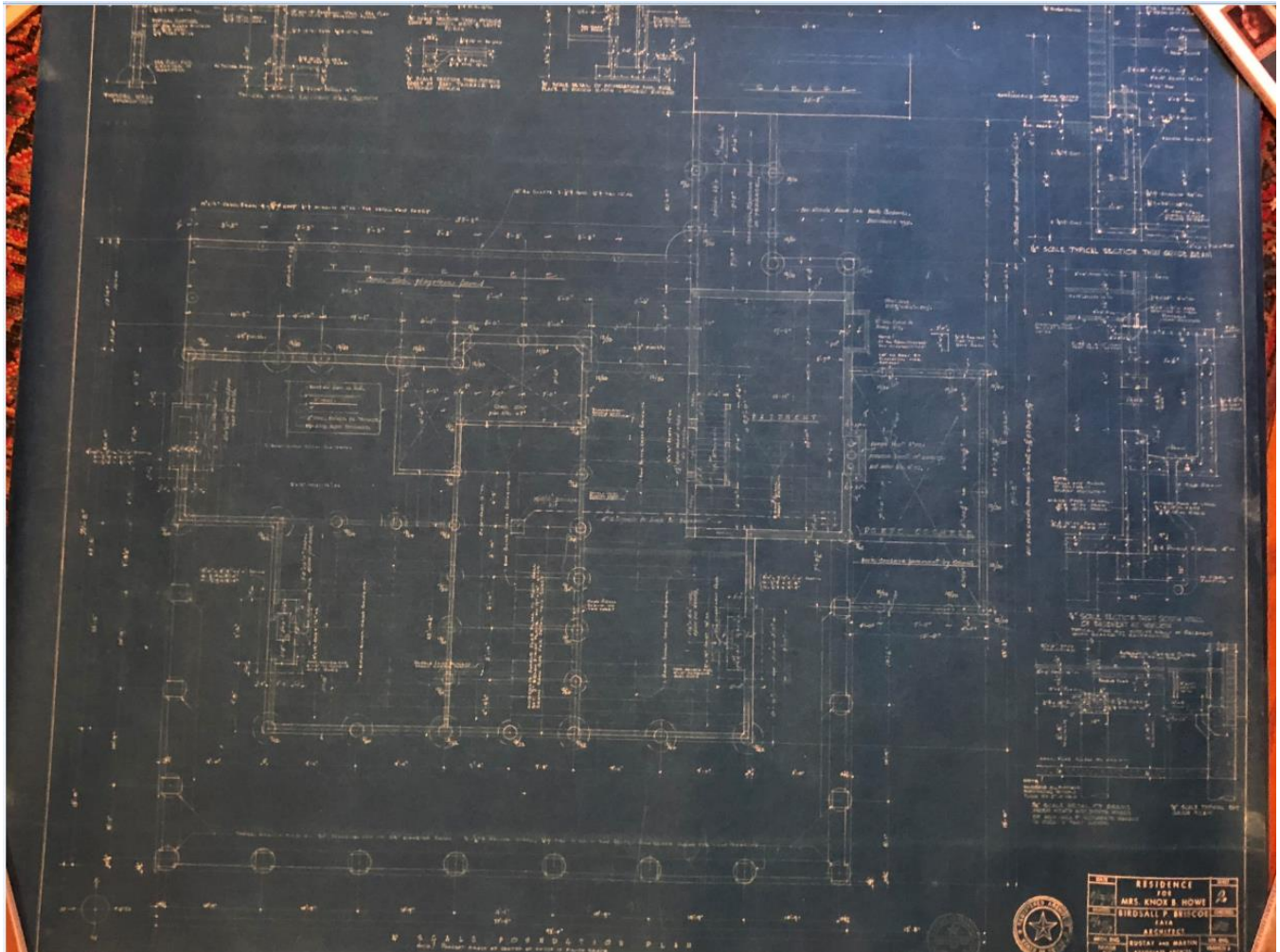
THE TRONE-HOWE HOUSE  
4019 INVERNESS DRIVE  
SECOND FLOOR



THE TRONE-HOWE HOUSE  
4019 INVERNESS DRIVE  
ELEVATIONS

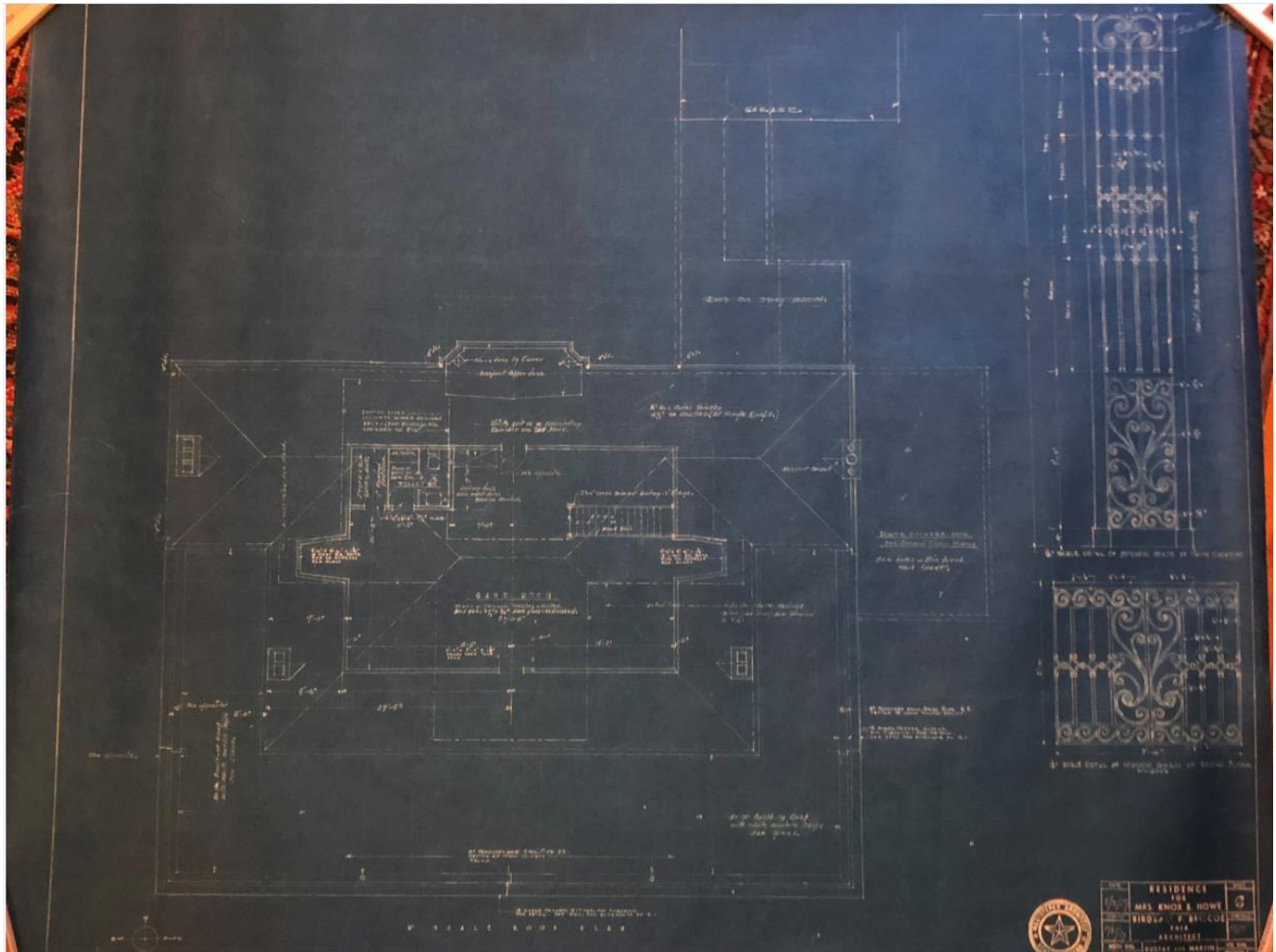


THE TRONE-HOWE HOUSE  
4019 INVERNESS DRIVE  
FOUNDATION PLAN



## THE TRONE-HOWE HOUSE 4019 INVERNESS DRIVE

### ROOF PLAN



**Planning and Development Department**

## SITE PLAN

